

## P U L A U   L A N G K A W I .

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“**T**HESE are bold islands, formed of and flanked by towering masses of limestone. I could find but few tracts of level ground upon these islands. They are dependencies of the Siamese Government of Kedah.”\* This is all that Colonel LOW, in 1849, found to write of this beautiful group of islands, and there is little other printed information about them. Situated in Lat.  $6^{\circ} 10'$  to  $6^{\circ} 27'$  North, and Long.  $99^{\circ} 37'$  to  $99^{\circ} 56'$  East, about seventy miles due north of Penang, they are clearly visible on a fine day from the top of Penang Hill, and the curious configuration of their limestone peaks, so unlike the ordinary scenery of the Straits of Malacca, invite exploration. Some notes, which I made during a cruise round the Langkawi Islands in December, 1887, enabled me to correct and supplement the geographical information contained in the latest Admiralty charts of this locality, as far as the native names of places are concerned, and I print them here, with a map, for the information of future travellers.

H. H. the Raja of Kedah (whose capital we had been visiting), as soon as he learned that our tour was to include the Langkawi Islands, kindly proposed to accompany us (my brother, Mr. R. W. MAXWELL, and myself), and to show us all the places of interest there. He declined, however, a passage in the *Sea Bird*, and brought his own steamer, with WAN MAT SAMAN, his Chief Minister, and a few other followers in attendance. We left the mouth of the Kedah River on the morning of December 26th, and steered direct for the East entrance

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\* Journ. Ind. Arch., III, 8.

of Bass' Straits, and entering a land-locked harbour reached a shallow bay, on the shore of which is the principal village of the island—a place named Kwah. Here, we were informed, there is a considerable population of both Malays and Chinese, principally fishermen. There is a certain amount of cultivation, and the paddy-fields inland are said to be extensive. We did not land, but steamed on through the strait, having the main island on our right and the island of Dayang Bunting on our left. Just opposite the village of Kwah across the strait are the limestone cliffs of Tanjong Tirei (on Dayang Bunting), very precipitous, and immediately behind the village, but far inland, rises the conical peak of Gunong Raya, the highest point in the island, about 2,900 feet high. Fishing stakes here and there in the strait and an occasional *kampung* on the shores of the main island gave evidence of the presence of a Malay population, and now and then we passed a fishing boat, or a Chinese trading junk with picturesque brown sails.

Presently a view was opened up to the northward of a long serrated ridge with fifteen or twenty peaks, which the Malays call Gunong Chinchang, or the "chopped mountain," from its supposed resemblance to a board in the edge of which deep indentations have been cut with a hatchet.

On the South coast of Pulau Langkawi there are the following places between Kwah and Tanjong Sawah, which we passed in the order in which their names are given:—Klébang, Těpah, Langkana, Těmoyang (river and small *kampung*), and Teluk Baharu. On the coast of Dayang Bunting opposite, we passed Batu Uban, Tanjong Lilit, and the limestone cliffs of Goa Langsiah, where there is a cave. Here, we were told, grows in profusion a ground orchid with a yellow flower in great demand among collectors. The islanders had, it appeared, recently learned that it possesses a money value, owing to the visit of a collector, who paid a cent a-piece for specimens. I have since ascertained that the plant in question is the *Cypripedium Nivium*.

The scenery hereabouts is very striking. The fantastic shapes of the limestone cliffs and peaks of Dayang Bunting, the islets dotted about in the strait, the smooth expanse of deep blue water, and the distant ranges of Gunong Raya and

Gunong Chinchang, make up a picture not to be equalled anywhere in the Straits of Malacca.

The islets in the strait are called Pulau Kědra, and the following are some of the names of the numerous islands to the West of Pulau Dayang Bunting:—Pulau Chupak (very small), Pulau Gubang, Pulau Jong, Telam Banton, Pulau Singha, and Pulau Bras Basah.

To the North nearer to the shores of the main island, are Pulau Lalang, Pulau Ular, and Pulau Hantu.

Steaming out of the strait and leaving Pulau Hantu on the right, we sighted Pulau Adang in the distance, far out to sea, bearing about N. N. W. This island is famous for its turtle.

Then, passing between Pulau Těpur and Tanjong Sawah (the S. W. point of the main island), we steamed on past two islands—Pulau Rěbah—and headed for Tanjong Bongkok Pennyú, called on the chart “The Dolphin’s Nose.” This is a bold headland, the end of the Gunong Chinchang range, with a hump on the top of it. There are fishing stakes in the straits between the islands above-mentioned and Pulau Langkawi, and small settlements on the coast of the latter. Round the fishing stakes, flocks of gulls (*chěnchamar*) were wheeling. Nearly opposite Pulau Rěbah is Tanjong Padikik.

Entering the bay on the South side of Tanjong Bongkok Pennyú, we dropped anchor in deep water not far from shore. This place is called by the Malays *Burau*, which is a corruption of two Siamese words *bor ran*, “old well”; a walk of about a mile and a half through the jungle, ending with a steep climb, brings one out on a face of precipitous rock, through which a mountain torrent has worn itself a channel. Here we see the “well,” or series of wells (the Malays say there are seven and call the place *tělaga tujoh*), from which the Siamese name originated.

No longer in the bed of the stream, which has probably shifted, as the rock has been worn down under the attrition of centuries, there are here and there deep circular holes which seem to have been cut out with sufficient accuracy to excuse the natives of these parts for supposing that they are the work of mankind. But the stream close by has doubtless been the

agency, in some former period, when the rocks were not quite as we now see them, and when the "old well" was at the foot of some small cascade and was gradually hollowed out with the accuracy with which a hole is made in a Stilton by a cheese-scoop.

On the morning of the 27th, after another visit to the shore for a morning bath in the river, we continued our cruise round the island. The coast scenery hereabouts is very fine. Steep cliffs rise sheer from the water's edge, the bare rocks below gradually merging into slopes, clothed with jungle above. There is not a sign of cultivation or of a human habitation, and the whole of the Gunong Chinchang range is, I fancy, unexplored and unvisited save when some of the more adventurous of the population climb for the wild bees' nests in the crannies of the limestone cliffs. The wax is a royal perquisite, and the daring climbers get only a small proportion of their actual take. We passed Sungei Tama Kéchil, a gorge in the hills, and, further on, Tanjong Bésar. Here our course was nearly due north, with Pulau Těrutau, a very large island, right ahead. A shoal of pomfret (*ikan bawal*), one of the best fish that the Bay of Bengal produces, occasioned some excitement among our crew, but we were not equipped for a fishing expedition. The presence of a boat (*sampan pukat*) off Tanjong Chin-chin shewed that this is a well-known fishing ground. A cave near the water's edge called Lobang Chin-chin, "the cave of the ring," was pointed out, but what the legend concerning it is, we did not learn. After passing Tukun Raja we altered our course and headed eastward, with Pulau Těrutau on our port bow. A singular-looking island off Pulau Těrutau, resembling a ruined castle, is called Pulau Bělétong, and the edible birds' nests of Chinese commerce are said to be found there. Beyond it is Pulau Burong.

With the mountains of Sětul in view on the mainland in front of us, we passed in turn the following places on the coast of Pulau Langkawi:—Tanjong Těmbún, Teluk Tóma, Sungei Gatal, Langgara (a river here), Tanjong Temburun, Tanjong Pembuta, Pulau Jemburong, Kuala Kubang Badak, Sungei Ewa, Pulau Dangli (small islets), Oo (where



there are said to be paddy-fields), Pulau Kasin (a distant islet to the North is called Pulau Kweh), and Tanjong Gamarau. Here there is a bay where there are said to be hot springs; the island in the bay is called Pulau Bëlibis.

Passing Tanjong Gamarau, with Gunong Raya in the distance bearing nearly due South, and an island called Pulau Tanjong Dundang right ahead, we came to an anchor nearly opposite our destination—Goa Cherita. The coast scenery about here is very fine, an endless series of fantastic peaks furnishing perpetual variety.

Goa Cherita is traditionally reputed to be the cave in which, according to the early history of Kedah, the shipwrecked Prince of Rùm was hidden and tended by his future wife—the daughter of the Emperor of China. The story may be read in the chronicles of Kedah, called *Marong Mahawangsa*, an inferior English translation of which (by Colonel LOW) is to be found in the *Journal of the Indian Archipelago*, Vol. III. The legend is briefly as follows:—

The island of Langkapuri, after the war between RAMA and RAWANA, celebrated in the Rámáyana, was little frequented, and in later ages became the home of the bird Garuda (pronounced by Malays *Gerda*)—the eagle of Vishnu. Gerda learnt that a marriage was projected between the son of the Emperor of Rùm and the daughter of the Emperor of China, and, in order to prevent the aggrandisement of the former empire, thought it desirable to prevent the match. So he presented himself before God's prophet SULEIMAN, who then ruled the world and all created things, not only mankind, but all spirits (*jin, peri, dewa* and *mambang*), and all animals on the face of the earth. He represented the necessity of preventing the young couple from meeting, but King SOLOMON declared that no power on earth could prevent it. On this, Gerda announced that he could and would prevent it, and vowed that, if unsuccessful, he would for ever abandon the haunts of men. The prophet bade him do his worst and come back and relate the story of his success when it should have been accomplished.

Gerda then successfully swooped down upon the garden of the Emperor of China, and carried off in his talons the princess and two female attendants, whom he set down in safety on

his island—Langkapuri. Next he attacked and sunk the fleet in which the young Prince of Rúm, under the guidance of a trusted minister named MARONG MAHAWANGSA, was sailing for the capital of China to be united to his betrothed. The scene of the shipwreck was on the eastern side of the Bay of Bengal, and the prince, who clung to a plank, was cast on shore on the island of Langkapuri. Here, one day, he was found by the princess of China and her attendants, who hid him in a cave, and carefully concealed from the bird Gerda the fact of his presence. The *dénouement* is easily guessed. When Gerda appeared before King SOLOMON to boast that he had carried out his determination, the prophet despatched a *jín* to Pulau Langkapuri, and had the prince, the princess and their attendants conveyed in a chest to his audience hall, where Gerda was put to shame, and the inutility of attempting to resist the course of pre-ordained fate was demonstrated.

The chronicler of Kedah, which, by the way, was colonised by the minister of the Emperor of Rúm—MARONG MAHAWANGSA—seems to have been sufficiently satisfied that Pulau Langkapuri, the scene of the wars of RAMA and RAWANA, was identical with the island off the coast of Kedah which the Malays now call Langkawi, and which may have been called Langkapuri in former times. And successive generations of Kedah Malays have, no doubt, been ignorant of the identity of Langka with Ceylon, and have contentedly localised their legend in an island of their own. So it is not surprising that the islanders are still able to point out the very cave in which the prince of Rúm was hidden from his enemy—the bird Gerda, who in former times had taken part in the wars of the Rámáyana.

We landed in a sandy bay between two rocky headlands, and viewed the cave, which is principally remarkable for an inscription in Malay carved in the rock at a height of some twelve feet from the ground. It has been much injured by exposure to the weather, but seems to record the visit of some Raja 240 years ago, if the date A. H. 1060, which occurs in the inscription, is to be taken as the date when it was written and not of some past event commemorated at a later period. Perhaps, with some trouble, a better conjecture as to the

